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Contact: Anastasia Burton, Medicaid Managed Care Bureau, DPHHS, 444-9538
Gayle Shirley, Public Information Officer, DPHHS, 444-2596

Calls to Medicaid Nurse First Advice Line Reach Unprecedented Levels

(HELENA)---Medicaid clients are making unprecedented use of a state advice line that helps them seek appropriate medical care, a state Medicaid official said Tuesday.

In fact, use of the Nurse First Advice Line was twice as high in February as in January, according to Mary Angela Collins, chief of the Medicaid Managed Care Bureau of the state Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

“It’s apparent that the need for this service is very high among clients,” Collins said. “Nurse First helps clients get the right care at the right time at the right place.”

Nurse First is a free, 24x7 service staffed by registered nurses. Eligible Medicaid clients can call the line when they need advice about appropriate healthcare services.

In February, the advice line received 2,011 calls compared to 1,461 in January, Collins said. That translates into a rate of 0.419 calls per member in February. Nurse advice line Medicaid call rates typically fall around 0.15 per member per year, according to McKesson Health Solutions, the company that contracts with DPHHS to provide the service.

Collins attributed the increase in February calls to a mailing the state sent to eligible Medicaid clients to remind them of the service’s availability, the reasons to call, and the type of information and help available. (Clients are encouraged to call 911 or their local emergency services provider if they believe a situation is life threatening).

Additionally, call rates vary month-to-month and are usually higher in the winter due to illnesses such as influenza.

The mailing informed eligible Medicaid clients that nurses at the advice line will:

- ask about symptoms or health concerns;
- help the client decide the best time and place for care; and
- provide self-care tips, if appropriate.

Nurse First has been taking calls and helping Montana Medicaid clients since January 2004. The service offers professional medical advice to Medicaid clients, and is expected to save the State an estimated \$1.2 million in annual savings.

For more information about Nurse First, contact Program Officer Tedd Weldon at teweldon@mt.gov.

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